1: Honigmann E-5 (1943-1945) 1949 ND12 Nahane ND12

Language and Communication

The division of Kaska speech into four mutually intelligible dialects has already been discussed in connection with the tribal differentiation of the Kaska nation. These languages belong to the Athapaskan stock and, like most of the divisions of that group, are tone languages.

In addition to understanding the speech of the members of other Kaska tribes, most people can also manage to understand non-Kaska speakers from surrounding areas who use more distinctive Athapaskan dialects. The mutual intelligibility of the dialects has probably contributed to reducing the need for any marginal language. Some men understand and can speak a little Chinook, but this jargon is never used within the community.

To whites and, to a lesser degree, among themselves, the Kaska speak a variety of English which follows some of the rules of that language but possesses distinctive features of its own. Thus, for example, the feminine gender is usually ignored and the pronouns "he" or "him" are sometimes applied to both sexes and neuter objects. In replying to a question employing the negative, "Yes" is largely used instead of "No." Thus, "You don't know that story?" is answered, "Yes," if the speaker wishes to indicate a lack of knowledge. In speaking English, the sound l is substituted for r by most adults. A few French words have entered the language; *merci* is sometimes used for "thanks" and the adjective *li* is occasionally employed for "the." Several Tlingit words (like *gukšis* for "thank you") are also employed.

While orthography is of minor importance in this monograph, a brief statement of the signs used to represent some sounds occurring in the kinship terminology and elsewhere should be given. The vowels are:

i· as in English *eat*
i as in English *it*
e front unrounded, somewhat like English *let*
æ as in English *hat*

Final vowels usually receive the weak stress found in the last sound of English *sofa*. A dot following other vowels than *i* indicates lengthening; in the case of *i* the dot signifies a high front unrounded vowel. The diphthong aj is pronounced as in English *my*.

Consonants are as in English, with some exceptions. The t is formed with the tongue against the lower teeth and is slightly voiced before most vowels. The dorsal lateral spirant l is pronounced as in the Welsh. Other consonants include the voiced and voiceless dorsal spirants, γ and x; the glottal stop, ʔ; the voiceless apical slit spirant θ, and the frontal spirants š and ž.

All of the data for the present study were collected in English, and, since some of this data has been published verbatim, some attention may be paid to the English vocabulary of the Kaska. The following list of words and phrases indicate the principal local usages developed for English words.

ANYBODY, *pron.* Everybody, as "anybody eat."
BOSS, *n.* A person who has the right to act upon, order, and care for an object, animal, place, or person, thus, "I'm boss for that woman."

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Aug. 6.th 1940 We start for Lakes.
Aug. 7.th 1940 [John Keats] meet as on trail.

. . . . . .

Aug. 25.th 1940 We go to mountain for shap [sheep].
Aug. 26.th 1940 We stay at the mountain yet.
Aug. 27.th 1940 We go down to Lake.
Aug. 28.th 1940 Old Man [Wiley] and me and [Billy Barre] hunt moose Kill one moose.
Aug. 29.th 1940 I kill two Bull moose. and We goe home, for the camp.

Young people occasionally make photographic records with simple folding or box cameras; these are generally pictures of friends and relatives. The films are mailed to large cities for developing and printing. Great pleasure is found in looking at photographs, even after they have been seen many times before. Informants were also pleased to show a copy of the *National Geographic Magazine*, for May 1942, containing the record of the Albees' trip through the Upper Liard River valley and showing pictures of both deceased and living people.[14]

People communicate from one bank of a river to another by shouting; young men may also whistle. In the bush two smoke fires are said to be the signal for distress. Generally, if a person becomes lost in the bush, he fires a large caliber rifle and then waits for an answer. If he is injured, he may fire a number of shots in quick succession. Between winter settlements located as many as eight miles apart, gun fire is sometimes used for signaling.

In winter, if anyone leaves a settlement for a visit to the trading post, he is sure to be given messages to the storemen requesting additional supplies and a small increase in credit. These messages are usually laboriously pencilled by someone who can write, verbal messages being ignored by traders unless accompanied by cash. Notes are sometimes left at cabins when the occupants go away. Such notes commonly explain the reason for leaving and give the destination of the occupants.[15] Ordinarily Indians have little occasion to write letters. When they wish to do so, help is usually solicited from the independent trader in Lower Post.

Visitors between winter settlements, or in summer, from other parts of the area, disseminate news. Such transmission generally occurs at informal gatherings, perhaps while the visitor is refreshing himself with a cup of tea. News circulated in this way includes accounts of illness, death, luck in hunting, and the progress of house construction, as well as the activities of traders and other white people. Such accounts very rarely contain personal items unfavorable to a subject, gossip of this kind being either suppressed or withheld for more intimate occasions.

Property

Among the Kaska Indians, property—that is, those social relationships controlling the use and alienation of some subject matter[16]—tends to be of relatively little importance.

[14] Albee and Albee, *Family Afoot in the Yukon Wilds* (1942).

[15] Albee and Albee, *Family Afoot in the Yukon Wilds* (1942), 690. The specimen note given by the authors is very similar to ones which we encountered three years later.

[16] Murdock, et. al., *Outline of Cultural Materials* (1945), 24.